ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Case File No.: AA-18960
AK-040-EA00-023

Type of Action: Cache Creek Mine Waste Removal Action

Location: Yentna Mining District, Alaska, Section 1 & 2, T. 28 N., R. 9 W., Seward Meridian

Applicant: Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office

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Preparing Office: Bureau of Land Management
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Date: September 5, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

The abandoned Sunshine #1 and #2 placer mining claims are located on upper Cache Creek, within the Yentna Mining District. The town of Trapper Creek is approximately 40 miles east of the subject lands. The claims can be accessed by 4-wheel drive vehicle from Anchorage via the Parks Highway. To get to the site from the Parks Highway, turn west at the town of Trappers Creek onto the Petersville Road. After driving approximately 40 miles on the progressively deteriorating gravel road, turn upstream to the north after reaching Cache Creek, then follow a very rough road which is paralleling, and in some sections contained within the creek channel. The subject abandoned mining claims are located near the top of the drainage. The former claims can also be accessed by driving through the upper Peters Creek Canyon. After crossing the creek, the road winds up a very steep hill, and through a divide down into Cache Creek. The site is inaccessible when the creeks are at high flow levels. Additionally, the local roads are periodically degraded by heavy equipment movement and mining activity on nearby mining properties.

Placer mining began on Cache Creek in 1913 and has been occurring in different parts of the drainage on a fairly continuous basis ever since. The claims have probably been mined several times over the years, although BLM did not start tracking operators until 1980. A mining notice was first filed on the Sunshine #1 and #2 mining claims with BLM in 1984 by Steven Sneed for the Eclipse Mining Company. The claimants were Steven Sneed, Sarah Ann Sneed, Gene Sneed, and E.A. Sneed. In August 1986, Mr. Randy Brown allegedly purchased the claims from the Sneeds and became the mine operator. However, the Sneeds remained as claimants of record along with Mr. Brown. The last year mining occurred was 1987, with Mr. Brown as the operator. The subject claims were determined abandoned and void in a decision issued on April 9, 1992.

Several attempts were made to have the former claimants cleanup the site, most recently in a letter sent to Randy Brown in 1996. A noncompliance notice was issued to Mr. Brown from BLM on October 5, 1994, for failure to complete the necessary reclamation. Mr. Brown verbally assured BLM that he would reclaim the site in 1994 and 1996, but no reclamation occurred. In 1999, BLM performed a site investigation of the subject claims for the Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) program. Solid and potentially hazardous waste was inventoried and photographed during the site investigation.

BLM conducted a second site investigation this summer on August 10th to perform a Preliminary Assessment and plan a removal action. The removal action will involve the recycling and/or disposal of two 55 gallon drums of containerized waste oil and lead/acid batteries.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:
The abandoned Sunshine # 1 and #2 mining claims are on a parcel of BLM land selected by the State of Alaska. The State will not accept this parcel until the former mine is cleaned up and the land restored to an acceptable condition. Work outlined in the Proposed Action, including the removal of waste engine oil, heavy equipment batteries, and assorted solid waste, should restore the lands to a condition acceptable for conveyance.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:
The lands are within the boundary of the Alaska Southcentral Planning Area Management Framework Plan (MFP), dated March 1980. The Proposed Action is covered under the Watershed (W-1) Activity Objective of the MFP which states that BLM is to "maintain water quality in accordance with the Alaska Water Quality Standards". The Proposed Action is also covered under the Visual Resources (VR-3) Activity Objective which states that “BLM rehabilitate cultural modifications to a point at which they will meet the scenery quality of the surrounding landscape.”

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:
BLM is proposing to remove hazardous materials and solid waste from the abandoned Sunshine #1 and #2 placer mining claims, Sections 1 and 2, T. 28 N., R. 9 W., Seward Meridian. BLM plans to dispose of approximately two 55 gallon drums of waste oil, approximately a dozen lead-acid batteries, and assorted solid waste. BLM intends to remove the materials via truck and/or helicopter.

A helicopter pad will not need to be cleared near the mine for landing, loading and take-off. The vegetation was stripped during past mining and little revegetation has occurred on the claims. Containerized waste materials will be hauled to a loading area via industrial hand trucks, secured to pallets, cargo netted and sling-loaded to a waiting truck at a more accessible site. Appropriate waste containment measures will be available (oil containment booms or "pigs", Visqueen, absorbent pads, additional waste containers, recovery booms) in case the sling strap fails, and/or the containerized waste should enter the surrounding areas. Once the consolidated waste is labeled, properly manifested and safely transported, the waste material will be shipped to appropriate recycling facilities or licensed disposal facilities. On site soil treatment or removal to an approved facility might be necessary should contaminated soils be found during the course of the removal action.

All work areas in this project are on previously disturbed former mining operation

areas. BLM will hire environmental consultants to plan and implement the removal operation at the site according to all federal and state environmental and safety regulations. BLM will visit the site prior to the removal action to determine the exact means of waste extraction. The waste extraction method will depend on site access which will be dependent on the current stream levels and road conditions. Removal of waste materials is anticipated to begin in September 2000 (weather and scheduling permitting).

B. No Action Alternative:
Under the No Action Alternative, the BLM will continue to implement current management practices. There would be no further investigation or cleanup actions implemented on-site.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:
The following critical elements are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative:

Air Quality
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Environmental Justice
Farm Lands, Prime or Unique
Floodplains
Invasive, Non-native Species
Native American Religious Concerns
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

1. Cultural Resources:
The Anchorage Field Office's (AFO) Cultural Resource specialist completed a review on August 14, 2000 (see attached). No cultural resources were identified as being impacted.

2. Subsistence:
Subsistence resources consist of a wide variety of wildlife and selective vegetation. A subsistence clearance report was submitted on August 7, 2000 (see attached). No impact to subsistence resources was identified.

3. T&E Species:
A Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species Evaluation, for wildlife and vegetation, was submitted on August 15, 2000 (see attached). No impact to T&E species was identified.

The following critical elements will be affected by either the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative:

4. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:
Hazardous materials that will be removed from the site include 55 gallon drums of waste oil, lead-acid batteries, and assorted solid waste.

5. Water Quality, Surface and Ground:
Surface and ground water at the mine are not used for drinking. However, due to extensive past mining the water in the area is generally considered to be of potentially degraded quality.

6. Wetlands and Riparian Zones:
Wetlands and riparian zones have been extensively disturbed and degraded by past mining activities. Due to the lack of mining reclamation, the site remains severely degraded with little reestablishment of wetlands or riparian vegetation.

B. Land Status:
The abandoned Federal mining claims are located on lands validly selected by the State of Alaska.

C. Soils:
The substrate consists of placer mine tailings consisting of washed gravels with little to no remaining soil material.

D. Vegetation:
Much of the area is dominated by willow, spruce, alder, birch and poplar. Balsam, poplar, cottonwood, various forbs and moss can be found around the mine. Little vegetation is present on the site due to past mining and no mining reclamation.

E. Visual Resources:
The visual appearance of the subject mining claims are severely degraded due to the lack of reclamation from past mining activities. Unreclaimed tailings, deteriorated structures, equipment and various types of solid waste litter the local landscape creating an eyesore to visitors. Other degraded sites from past mining exist downstream from the subject lands and in adjoining drainages.

F. Wildlife:
Moderate to low densities of moose occur in the areas associated with willow

shrubs and mixed forest. Predators such as wolves, black and brown bear, lynx and marten may frequent the area, but are highly mobile and would only be present for short periods of time. Resident and migrant land birds nest and feed in surrounding shrub (alder and willow) and forest habitats.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical elements:

a. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:
By removing the hazardous materials from the site, potential future ground and surficial water contamination will be avoided.

b. Water Quality, Surface and Ground:
Removal of the hazardous materials will preclude future opportunities for leaching of substances into the surface and ground waters. Removal of the hazardous materials could improve surface and ground water quality.

2. Soils:

Removal of the hazardous materials and any contaminated soils/gravels will improve overall soil/gravel conditions. If the hazardous materials were to remain present, so would the potential for contamination.

3. Vegetation:

No vegetation will be removed or disturbed. In the long term, the Proposed Action may result in a slightly faster rate of revegetation. Because the soils have been removed, revegetation will be a slow process.

4. Visual Resources:

The Proposed Action would improve the visual appearance of the area which has been severely degraded by unreclaimed tailings and abandoned solid and hazardous waste from past mining.

5. Wildlife:

The noise associated with helicopter landings and sling loading will temporarily displace wildlife from nearby, unaffected shrub and forest areas. Displaced animals may be more vulnerable to predators and may cause breeding birds to abandon nests and breeding territories, increasing mortality.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:
If not removed from the site, the hazardous material containers could eventually deteriorate and release contaminants to the soils/gravel, surface and ground water. The site could become a magnet for midnight dumping of waste from other sites.

b. Water Quality, Surface and Ground:
Surficial and ground water contamination could occur if the contaminants are left in place and the containers deteriorate releasing their contents.

2. Soils:
The No Action Alternative, which involves leaving solid and hazardous wastes on land that contains washed gravel tailings, would increase the likelihood of site contamination.

3. Vegetation:
Potential for bioaccumulation of toxins in plants could occur if these chemicals are left unattended to migrate into the water and soils/gravels.

4. Visual Resources:
The site would remain in a degraded state and an eyesore to visitors to the area. The site could become a magnet for midnight dumping of waste from other sites.

5. Wildlife:
Potential for bioaccumulation of toxins in wildlife could occur if these wastes are left unattended to migrate into the water and soils/gravels. Exposed, uncontainerized hazardous materials at the mine could enter the food chain via direct or indirect consumption by animals.

6. Land Status:
The State would continue to refuse conveyance of the lands if the site remains in a degraded condition.

C. Cumulative Impacts:
No residual or cumulative impacts are expected to be incurred by the implementation of the Proposed Action. Bioaccumulation of wastes and hazardous materials in plant and animal life may occur as a result of the No Action Alternative.

D. Mitigation Measures:

All potentially hazardous waste shall be placed in appropriate containers before transportation occurs.

Appropriate waste containment measures will be available (oil containment booms or "pigs", Visqueen, absorbent pads, additional waste containers) to prevent further contamination of the site should a spill occur.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:

Carl Persson - Geologist, Lead Preparer
Donna Redding - Archaeologist
Jake Schlapfer - Recreational Planner
Bruce Seppi - Wildlife Biologist
Debbie Blank - Botanist
Jeff Denton - Subsistence Specialist/Biologist
Michael Alcorn - Environmental Specialist
Bill Diel - AML Geologist